

Who, What, How, Why, and Why Not: A Primer for Literary Analysis of Fiction

People read books. Some books (think Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, and Jane Austen) are still widely read decades and even centuries after they were written. Many, many books (think of the highly forgettable ones you see in used book sales—over and over) are a flash in the pan or are even less noticeable. What's the difference? Is it just that most people like this book and most people dislike that one? Sort of, but it is more nuanced than that.

Literary analysis is studying the parts of a work of literature (such as plot, setting, characters, and narration) to see how the author uses them to create the overall meaning of the work as a whole. Professors, teachers, students, critics, and everyday people analyze works of literature: novels, short stories, poems, and non-fiction. They think about the story or plot of the book, how it develops, the characters in the book, the words and structure that the author uses, and other elements of the work.

People who analyze literature have developed standard methods. Primarily, this involves looking for elements that are found in most literary works. The purpose of literary analysis is to understand how a piece of literature works: how the writer constructs his or her story, and why the work affects readers the way it does.

Did you ever see yourself doing literary analysis? Does the phrase “literary analysis” make washing dishes or chopping firewood seem exciting? I understand. But it is more interesting than it might sound. Think of it as finding the answers to some big questions: “What makes a story good?” “What are the building blocks of great writing?” “Why do I keep thinking about that book and want to read it again?” “What is the difference between a book you stay up late to read and one that should be repurposed as a fire starter?” Even if you don't want to make a lifelong habit of literary analysis, as an educated person you should know the basics of how it works. It can also be kind of fun.

Literary analysis can help you appreciate the power of a work of literature. It can provide you with insights for a deeper appreciation of the next novel (or poem or history) you read. On a practical level, literary analysis is often what a classroom teacher wants students to do in order to understand a book. So literary analysis is good as long as it is a means to a good end and achieves a worthy goal. However, if literary analysis becomes an end in itself, or a way to show how much someone knows or thinks he knows about literature, or something that gets in the way of enjoying a work of literature, it no longer serves a good purpose. In other words, literary analysis has its place; but it is not the purpose of literature.

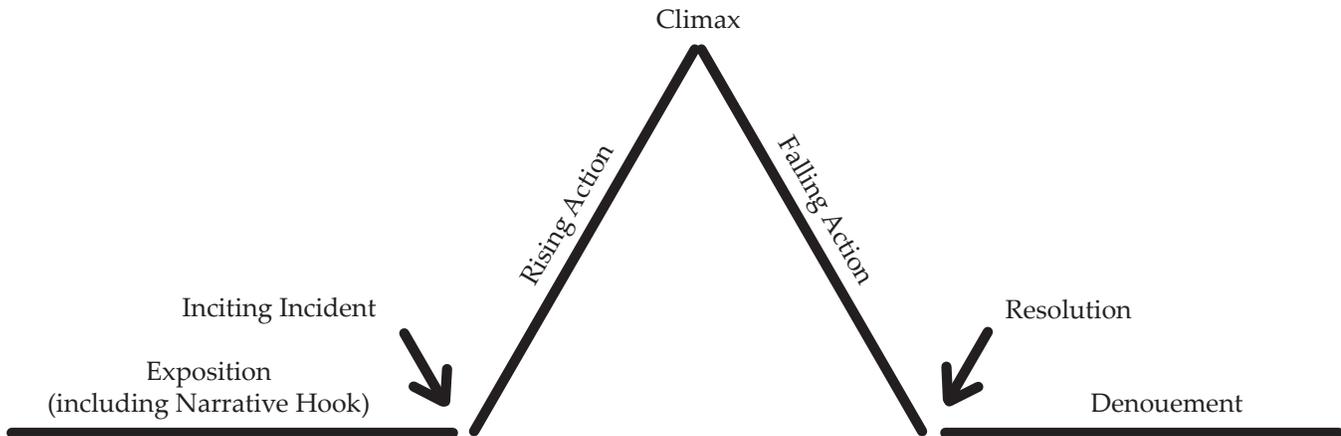
Writers do not write in order to have their work subjected to literary analysis. Nathaniel Hawthorne did not write *The Scarlet Letter*, nor did Charles Dickens write *A Tale of Two Cities*, for English teachers to analyze them to death or so that professors would have material for exams. They wrote because they had stories to tell; they wanted to connect on an emotional level with readers. These authors were successful because they did that well, and this is why their books are considered classic works of literature.

Here are some standard elements of literary analysis.

Plot

The **plot** is the story of a piece of **fiction**. Fiction is a work of imagined narrated prose, usually either a novel or a short story. The plot is what happens to make it a story.

Gustav Freytag was a nineteenth-century German novelist who found a typical pattern of plot development in Greek and Shakespearean dramas. The same pattern is found in most fictional literature. Freytag depicted it as a pyramid.



The examples below refer to *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

Exposition: *laying out the situation and background, introducing the characters. (Within this element will often be a **narrative hook**, an event or description that gets you interested in the story and wanting to read more.)* Four children come to stay in a professor's country home. The narrative hook is when Lucy finds a magic wardrobe in a back room and visits Narnia: what will happen next?

Inciting incident: something that gets the story moving.

Lucy meets the faun, who expresses inner conflict over what he is doing.

Rising action: building drama; each significant event is called a complication.

All four children go to Narnia, they meet the Beavers, Edmund betrays his siblings to the White Witch, and so forth.

Climax: the single key event or turning point; the moment of greatest tension.

Aslan sacrifices his life on behalf of Edmund.

Falling action: events that occur as a result of the climax.

The good and evil creatures in Narnia have a battle.

Resolution: the event in which the main issue is resolved.

Aslan's side wins. The four children are established as kings and queens.

Denouement (day-new-maw): the finishing out and tying up of the details of the story.

The four children grow up, rule Narnia, and then return to their own world.

Freytag's Pyramid is only a typical plot development. It accurately describes the plots of many pieces of fiction, but there are many variations and exceptions. Writers do not necessarily write to the Freytag Pyramid. Don't try to force a work into the pyramid if it doesn't seem to fit. In addition, people will sometimes have different ideas about what is the narrative hook, inciting incident, resolution, or even the climax in a really dramatic story.

The key question to ask about the plot of a piece of literature is, “What is the **conflict**?” What is the issue that the main character needs to resolve? Is it conflict within himself, perhaps between what he wants and what he actually has? Is it a conflict between himself and another character, or between himself and the expectations of others? Is it the conflict of wanting to reach a goal but being unable to do so? What keeps or moves the character out of stability and causes tension? The tension between Pip and Estella is one conflict in *Great Expectations*. The quest for the ring is a continuing conflict in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. A skillful writer might have several lines of conflict in a work and interweave them into a gripping **narrative**. Conflict and struggle are how we grow as persons, so the conflict in a story is an important way for us to identify with the characters in the story.

The time, place, and social environment of a story is the **setting**. The plot unfolds in these surroundings. Is the story set among the working class of early nineteenth-century England, among fishermen of first-century Israel, among slaves in the southern United States just before the Civil War, or among homeschooling families of twenty-first century America? The setting will affect what characters know, their assumptions and aspirations, and how they act and speak. The geographical setting always impacts the development of the story: isolated mountain villagers will act and speak differently from urban dwellers. The rural and urban settings—and the conflict between them—in *Cry, the Beloved Country* are crucial to the story.

Another key element of the plot is the **structure** of the story, how it is told. A straight **chronological narrative** is simplest, but an author might want to use **flashbacks** (descriptions of events that happened earlier, out of chronological order) and **foreshadowings** (hints at things that will come later) to convey attributes of characters or particular feelings to the story.

Archetypes (ARK-eh-types) are typical or standard plot elements, such as a character on a quest, the pursuit of an elusive goal, the loss of innocence, or an initiation into a new situation. Many of the world’s most famous works of literature include one or more of these elements because these situations make for a good story. Everyone goes through these times or has these dreams.

Characters and Characterization

- The **characters** are the people in a story.
- The **protagonist** is the main character of the story (Jo in *Little Women*).
- The **antagonist** is the character who works against the protagonist and provides some degree of conflict (the White Witch in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*).
- The **confidant** is someone to whom a character reveals his thoughts and motives (Margaret plays this role for Bessy and Mr. Bell plays this role for Margaret in *North and South*).
- The mentor teaches another character about life (Marmee in *Little Women*).
- A **foil** is often a minor character who by being a contrast illuminates another character (for instance, the slick operator who serves to highlight the integrity of the protagonist).
- Other typical characters are the **hero** (Sir Percy Blakeney, the Scarlet Pimpernel), the **scapegoat** (Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird*), and the **buddy pair** (Don Quixote and Sancho Panza).

- A **round character** is three-dimensional, one whose personality is well-developed and who has some internal struggles expressed. In other words, he is believable and realistic. David Copperfield is a round character. A **flat character** is not developed in the story (Jethro in *The Cat of Bubastes*). A **stock character** portrays a stereotypical role, such as the cruel stepmother in *Cinderella*, the slow and dimwitted policeman, or the unemotional accountant. A stock character might be round or flat. A **dynamic character** changes during the story (matures or regresses, as Margaret Hale does in *North and South*), while a **static character** does not change (Fanny in *North and South*). A good author uses each character to advance the story in some way, not just to clutter the pages.

Characterization is the way that the author reveals the nature and personality of the characters. This is how the author makes a character real. What do you learn about a character in the course of the story? How do you learn about him or her? The narrator might tell the reader about a character (**direct characterization**), or the author might reveal a character's attributes by what the character says or does (**indirect characterization**). Typical methods of indirect characterization include a character's actions and his effect on others, a character's dress and appearance, how he talks and what he says, and the thoughts he reveals. The author might convey information about a character through his interactions with others, by what others say about the character, or by discrepancies between the character's reputation and his real actions or between what he says and what he does. A narrator (and through the narrator the author) might express an evaluation of a character by comments he or she makes. If a character grows or changes, how does the author show this: insights that she gains, experiences that teach her lessons, or by demonstrating different ways of acting or speaking over the course of the story?

Conflict within a character or between characters can be distinct from conflict in the story. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, for example, the conflict between the Defarges and the other French revolutionaries on one hand and the French aristocracy on the other is different from the conflict within Sydney Carton himself. What does a character do about conflict? Does he try to escape it, does he repress it, or does he address it?

Narrative

The Narrator. Who is telling the story? One key element of the narrative is the point of view of the narrator. The narrator might be **first person**, a character in the story. A first person narrator might be a major or a minor character in the story. The character David Copperfield is the first person narrator of the Charles Dickens novel by that name; the first-person narrator Ishmael in *Moby Dick* is a relatively minor character in that book. A narrator might be **third person**, one who is not a character in the story. The narrator might be **omniscient**, meaning that he or she knows the thoughts and motives of each character, or he might be **limited omniscient**, knowing the thoughts and motives of just one person. A narrator might be **objective**, not knowing anything about the inner thoughts of the characters except what the characters themselves reveal. One way to describe an objective narrator is that he knows and conveys only what a camera sees. A rare form of narration is **second person**, by which the author describes the reader himself going through the events of the story. Another rare form of narration is the **stream of consciousness** approach, in which the narrator relates the jumble of his own (or one character's own) thoughts as they occur to him. William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* is told in a stream of consciousness approach.

An author chooses the narrative approach for a reason. In *Great Expectations*, the reader has much more sympathy for Pip, the main character and first person narrator, than he would if the story were told by a third person narrator, although Dickens used third person narrators in many of his works.

Narrative Mood. What is the **mood** or **tone** of the narration? Is the narrator light-hearted, angry, skeptical, condescending, or sad and defeated? The mood of the characters might be different from the tone the author conveys. The characters might be harsh and judgmental, but the narrator could be sympathetic to the victims of the harshness. Simon Legree is a harsh character in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; but the author/narrator Harriet Beecher Stowe is sympathetic to Tom, the target of Simon's harshness. The author might have an agenda or cause he is trying to get across through the way the book is narrated. A rare approach is the unreliable narrator who is so prejudiced that the reader cannot trust what the narrator says and has to filter what the narrator says to determine the truth. It is possible for an author to have a tone or agenda that is different from the tone or agenda of the narrator. For instance, the author might want to condemn the lifestyle of the rich and famous. To do so he makes the narrator so fawning toward and accepting of the rich and famous that it turns the reader off. This is a subtle form of sarcasm as a tone.

Narrative Style. An author will use a particular **style**, such as formal or colloquial language, or take a logical or emotional approach to the story. Does the author use **dialog**, which is the recording of direct quotes of conversations between characters, to advance the story?

Literary Techniques. How does the author use words to tell his story? He has several tools at his disposal.

- **Imagery** is using descriptive language to convey appearance or other attributes. It is painting pictures with words. Compare "We walked between two large rocks and came to a big field" to "The narrow passage between the towering cliffs opened into a meadow lush with wildflowers."
- **Simile** is a comparison using like or as. "His encouragement was like a breath of fresh air to me."
- **Metaphor** is a comparison in which one thing is said to be another. "You are a rock of stability to me."
- **Symbolism** is the use of one thing to represent another. Literature often uses **archetypical symbols** to convey certain ideas: night often portrays mystery or evil; a mountain can represent an obstacle to overcome; winter and spring can represent death and rebirth.
- **Allegory** is an extended comparison, in which every or almost every character or event represents something else. *Animal Farm* is an allegory of the Russian Revolution.
- **Apostrophe** is addressing someone who is not present or something that is not human. "Caesar, thou are revenged" (from *Julius Caesar*, spoken after Caesar was dead).
- **Synecdoche** (sih-NEK-doh-key) is using a part for the whole. "Ten thousand feet marched down the street to an endless beat of drums" (people marched, not just feet).

- **Metonymy** (meh-TONN-eh-mi) is substituting one term for another because of the close association between the two. “The White House announced a new economic stimulus package today” (meaning the president or an administration official did so, not the physical structure at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C.).
- **Hyperbole** is intentional overstatement. “I think of you a million times a day.”
- **Litotes** (LIH-tuh-teez) is intentional understatement. “His donation to the charity was not insignificant” (meaning it was significant).
- **Irony** is a contrast between appearance and reality. Irony can be situational (a man proposing marriage to a woman in a comical setting such as being stuck in a elevator, or characters trying to keep from laughing out loud in a quiet museum), verbal (one character doing something foolish and another character saying the opposite, such as, “That was an intelligent thing to do!”), or dramatic (the reader knows more than the character does, so the reader knows that it is ironic that the character is doing this because it is fruitless or dangerous).
- **Oxymoron** (ox-ee-MORE-on) is a contradiction in terms. “The silence was deafening.”
- **Paradox** is a phrase or statement that appears to be contradictory but in fact might convey a deep truth. “I know that I know nothing at all.”
- **Antithesis** is putting together two opposite ideas to achieve the effect of a contrast. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”
- **Personification** is the giving of human traits to non-human things. “The trees waited eagerly for the rising of the sun.”
- **Alliteration** is the repetition of the same initial verbal sound. “Billy bounced a ball by the backyard barbecue.” To be more specific: assonance is the repetition of the same vowel sound; consonance is the repetition of the same consonant sound. Alliteration gives rhythm to a statement or phrase that can increase its emotional impact. “And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting/On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door.”

Topic and Theme. A book will usually have a topic and a theme. These are two different attributes even though they sound similar. A **topic** is a brief description of the book, such as, “The French Revolution,” “How Lenin’s Communist Russia operated,” or “Life in a nineteenth-century English factory town.” A **theme** can usually be stated in one sentence and often expresses a universal idea that the story conveys. *Cry, the Beloved Country* is about redemption, making something good out of something bad. The theme of *North and South* is prejudice.

How does the author deal with the conflict and the theme? The author might convey his belief that the conflict is a result of the protagonist’s outdated or irrational mindset; if the character would be more open-minded, he would not have this conflict. The theme might be the privilege of the wealthy, which the author approaches with sarcasm because he thinks the wealthy ought not to have such privilege.

Your Response to the Story

As you read a work of literature, whether fiction, poetry, or non-fiction, interact with the text. Even more, interact with what the text is saying about life, or history, or whatever the topic is, and what the text says to you and about you. Are the plot and characters realistic and plausible? If they are unreal, does the author intend for them to be unreal and does this approach work? How are the characters products of their time and place and social setting and how do they transcend their setting? What is especially meaningful to you in terms of particular scenes, characters, dialog, or overall impact? How does the story make you feel, which is different from what you think about it? How does it make a difference for you?

Literary analysis is helpful when it clarifies how the author constructed the work. You can more deeply appreciate what he or she did and how the work conveys the intended message and mood. However, literary analysis can sometimes be emphasized to the point of making it seem more important than the work itself; and an analyst can come up with ideas about a work that the author never had in mind. Much of literary analysis is and should be subconscious on the part of the reader, the way we enjoy a good meal without over-analyzing all of the individual ingredients (although you should compliment the cook, and, if you are interested, ask how he or she prepared it). As you give thought to literary analysis, you can better appreciate the mental feast offered to you by what you read.

What Do You Think About What He Thinks?

A Primer for Analysis of Non-Fiction

A non-fiction article, essay, or book has a different approach from a work of fiction. It will likely make an argument, teach, or convey information. Of course, a work of fiction might also be an attempt to make an argument, teach, or convey information; but non-fiction presents the information and the author's perspective in a straightforward manner. The non-fiction piece might be in the form of a story; but it is a story from real life, as in a biography.

Part of education is considering perspectives other than your own and developing your response to them. In a persuasive work, a writer has something to say that he hopes others will at least consider and perhaps agree with. Even the author of a biography writes for a purpose, not only to inform but perhaps also to convince readers about something regarding his subject: that he was instrumental in a war, or influential in Congress, or had some other significant impact.

By reading a work of non-fiction, you might be confirmed in what you believe about something or you might be convinced that you need to change your opinion. You might obtain more information that helps you have a more realistic perspective on an issue. You shouldn't fear this process. You don't want to cast aside basic truth and fall for every new idea you hear, but part of growing and maturing is gaining a more complete understanding of truth. No one has a grasp of all truth or the perfect application of that truth in every situation. Everyone can grow in some areas of life, whether that means learning more truth or learning the application of the truth you know to more situations. This process is part of growing in what the Bible calls discernment (see Hebrews 5:13-14).

A text can be any written material. We analyze every text that we read, whether it is an encyclopedia article, a book of political commentary, or an advertisement, even if only briefly and subconsciously. As with the analysis of fiction, we don't want to lose the joy of reading by over-analyzing, but it is good to do serious and conscious analysis for several reasons. Analysis will help you understand the meaning and purpose of a text; you might even discern a meaning beneath the surface. It can help you connect the text with its background, such as the time in which it was written or something about the author. You can profitably compare the text with other texts to see which are more consistent and believable. Analyzing a text can help you prove a thesis. A summary of a text is a report of its content, but an analysis of a text is an evaluation of its meaning and significance.

In analyzing a work of non-fiction, you want to ask questions of the text. You probably won't answer every question below about every text, but here are things to consider when analyzing non-fiction:

- What is the author's point or purpose?
- What is the argument he is making?
- What is the motivation for the piece? What problem does it address?
- What evidence or logic does he use to support his thesis?
- What is the context from which the author writes (time, place, point of view, background and experience)?

- What assumptions does the author bring to writing this piece?
- What words or ideas are repeated? These will often be clues to the author's point.
- What word choices seem significant? Does the author use any figures of speech to make his argument more persuasive?
- What is the structure of the text? For instance, *The Art of War* is a series of pithy observations and bits of advice, *Here I Stand* is a scholarly biography, *Bridge to the Sun* is a memoir, and *The Abolition of Man* is based on a series of lectures. How does the author build his argument through the work? How does the structure help make the author's point?
- What are the key passages in the work, and why are they important?
- What is surprising, odd, or troubling in the text? (These parts are likely challenging your current understanding.)
- What contradictions and inconsistencies do you find in the text?
- What assumptions do *you* bring to the text?
- Is the text convincing to you? Why or why not? (It is entirely likely that you will agree with some things and disagree with others.)
- What questions do you have after reading it? What further study do you need to do?

When you write an analysis of a non-fiction work, gather your information, impressions, and answers to these questions, then write a coherent essay that responds to the piece. Depending on the length of your essay, you will probably want to summarize the author's purpose and argument, emphasize the central points as you see them, note where you think the author is correct and where he is mistaken, and where he is effective and where he could have expressed his ideas differently. Keep in mind the nature of your assignment, what the teacher expects from you, and what the reader of your analysis needs to understand about the work you are analyzing and about your response to it.

The author whose work you have read wants you to think. Show that you have thought. Expressing your thoughts on paper indicates how well you understand what he has said and, more importantly, how well you understand your own thoughts about the subject.

Literary Analysis

Silas Marner

by George Eliot

A closely-entangled religious order. A shattering betrayal. A rustic, sheltered village. A lonely weaver, nursing his pain and hoarding his earnings. A genteel family gone bad. A lost child. These are the basic elements of the simple, powerful story of *Silas Marner*.

The narrative needs only a few main characters to tell the story: Silas Marner, the weaver; Godfrey Cass, the spoiled gentleman; Nancy Cass, the wife he does not deserve; and Eppie, the sweet and gentle blessing. Supporting characters include Marner's friends in his earlier life, Dunstan Cass and other members of the Cass and Lammeter families, and the people of Raveloe.

Two central themes in *Silas Marner* subtly ask the reader to examine his or her own outlook. The first theme is faith: faith in God, in other people, in money and possessions, and in oneself. With a genuine faith, Silas Marner joins a rigid religious group. He has faith in the members of his fellowship, especially his friend William Dane. However, William and his church brethren completely shatter Silas' faith in them and in God. Silas does not risk trusting in other people for many years. The events of the story eventually lead Silas back to faith in God and to warm relationships with other people. Dolly Winthrop has a simple faith, and her kindness toward Silas helps lead him back to faith. Silas tells Eppie that the money he had lost had been "kept" for her, and that she had been "sent" to him, both statements reflecting a faith in God. Near the end of the book, Silas says, "I think I shall trusten till I die."

Trying to escape his difficulties, Godfrey Cass trusts in the money he was accustomed to having at his disposal and in "some throw of fortune's dice." His faith in wealth and luck prove unreliable. Godfrey also believed that he was not a scoundrel and that he had "no disposition to duplicity." Both were self-deceptions, demonstrating a misplaced trust in himself. For a long time Godfrey does not trust Nancy's love enough to tell her the truth about himself. In Godfrey's conversation with Silas and Eppie, Godfrey reveals his faith that his money and social status would bring him what he wants, but this trust fails to deliver as he expected it would.

During the years in which Silas buried his faith in God and in other people, he trusts only in his money. That faith proves unstable when his money disappears mysteriously all at once.

A religious faith, but not in God, has a strong influence in the village of Raveloe. Many people believe in superstitions and believe that a weaver has to have help from the Evil One. Silas is thought to possess special powers.

The novel presents the question to the reader: in what do you put your faith? All too often, a person who professes faith in Jesus Christ also "knocks on wood" and assumes the reality of "luck." Deep down, many trust that money, intelligence, the political system, good works, hard work, or family connections will bring what they want. When it comes down to it, where is your trust?

A second theme, money, is almost a character itself in the book. Most vivid is the money that Silas carefully hoards and practically worships. Though he seeks happiness and security in his wealth, in truth it makes him lonely and miserable. The shattering of Silas' early connections stem from William Dane stealing and lying in pursuit of money. When we first meet Godfrey Cass, he is entangled in a grave situation which has left him desperate for money. The wealthy in Raveloe lives in "careless abundance," and the wealth to which the Cass family is accustomed

becomes a burden through the weakness of their character. Godfrey and Nancy find that money cannot buy them a daughter. The story reminds us of what money can and cannot do. Money is a medium of exchange, but all too easily it can become our god. Money can be used to wield influence, but when worshiped and depended upon, it will bitterly disappoint. Thus, the story asks the reader: what is truly valuable? How do you measure worth?

Because economics is part of the fabric of real life, *Silas Marner* perfectly illustrates real-life examples of concepts you have (or will) encounter in your study of this course. The book makes reference to the Napoleonic Wars and how they affected prices, including the climbing price of land. Squire Cass fears that the end of the war will cause prices to fall and he will not be able to collect money from those who owe it to him. Silas' work as a weaver illustrates supply and demand (he supplies fabric to meet the demand for it) and the value of skill and productivity. In Chapter 17 Godfrey and Mr. Lammeter discuss "the increasing poor-rate and the calamitous times."

Moving from economics to related topics, the book highlights the contrast between those who are rich and poor financially, and those who are rich and poor in character and love. As the characters intermingle, each is permanently altered, and each makes an impact, for good or for ill. *Silas Marner* leaves a lasting impression on the mind of the reader as to what is even more precious than gold.

Questions on *Silas Marner*

1. In two or three paragraphs, examine how the author develops the character of Silas Marner through the story. How does Marner change, and what are the causes?
2. Refer to Freytag's Pyramid shown on page 4. Write down what you think is the element, event, or section of *Silas Marner* that correlates with each element of the pyramid: *exposition; narrative hook; inciting incident; rising action; climax; falling action; resolution; denouement*.
3. Write two or three paragraphs about the mood or tone of *Silas Marner*. Why do you think the author employs this mood? How does it help make the story effective? Are there any exceptions to the general mood in the narrative?

Literary Analysis

The Rise of Silas Lapham

by William Dean Howells

The Rise of Silas Lapham chronicles the rise and fall of an American businessman. Beginning with the title, the author employs irony: What was the rise of Silas Lapham? Was he at his best when climbing the ladder of success or when showing new heights of integrity?

To open the book, author William Dean Howells uses a journalist's interview to introduce the background and character of the protagonist (Howells was a journalist himself). We learn about Silas as he tells his own life story. The interviewer comments, "You're just one million times more interesting to the public than if you hadn't a dollar." This is true, but why? What fascinates us about those who are rich? Is it because we want what they have? Do we wonder how they became rich? Do we hope to find a flaw that will show that they aren't so great after all? The interview was part of a series entitled "Solid Men of Boston." We want to find out if Lapham is solid. Is he?

As with many works of fiction, the exposition (at the opening of the novel) has a slow start. The story gains traction and we find ourselves caring about what happens to Silas Lapham and his family. The novel employs an archetype "rags-to-riches" (and back again) plot.

Silas Lapham had a humble but respectable background in a farming family of Vermont. His father discovered a paint-mine on his farm but was never able to make it profit financially. A paint-mine refers to a deposit of minerals used in the manufacture of paint. Many years later, Silas Lapham developed this resource into a successful business, helped by his intelligent, devoted wife. Lapham became wealthy and moved his family to Boston. They had lived in a comfortable but unfashionable neighborhood for ten years when he decided to build a new house in an upscale part of the city. Mrs. Lapham wanted her daughters to be accepted in Boston society. The son of one of the most respected families in Boston, Tom Corey, befriends the Lapham family. Looking for a career, Tom Corey asks to work in Lapham's company. Tom's parents invite the Laphams to a high-society dinner party, a desired but also dreaded event for the family. It appears that Silas Lapham has reached the peak of his rise.

At this peak, with a new house to display his wealth near completion and the family's connections to society just beginning, things quickly begin to unravel for Lapham. The Corey's dinner party is a painful scene, full of tension palpable even to the reader. Lapham, nervous and clueless about how to behave, drinks too much and humiliates himself. Tom Corey's declaration of love for the elder Lapham daughter (rather than the younger, as everyone thought) rocks the family and tests their relationships. Milton Rogers, Lapham's ousted business partner and the novel's antagonist, appears again in their lives. Lapham, trying to assuage his conscience, tries to help him, only succeeding in draining his own money and energy. Lapham's paint business begins to suffer during an economic downturn. Lapham's customers can't pay what they owe him. A West Virginia company develops a better paint with lower production costs. The demand for Lapham's paint dwindles. He cannot pay his debts. The dismantling of his lofty position continues when Lapham accidentally sets his own nearly-completed house on fire.

Though Rogers plagues him to cooperate, Lapham uprightly rejects a shady deal that might have pulled him out of his troubles. Financially, he was ruined. He sells his floundering business to the West Virginia paint company. Lapham moves his family back to the farm. They are still reeling from the aftermath of the love triangle between Tom Corey and the two Lapham daughters. Silas continues to produce the premium paint that he had named for his wife.

Silas has lost almost everything materially, has no standing socially, and puts aside (at least most of) the bluster and bravado about himself. The sequence of events ends in a complete humiliation for this man who thought he had achieved success. In a memorable paradox, the loyalty and strength of character he shows during and after his downfall are the real rise of Silas Lapham.

The novel's characterization is finely and interestingly drawn. The story's main characters are round (three-dimensional, developed, believable.) They have flaws. They change. The reader can relate to them. Most of the plot development is carried in the dialog between characters. Characters Silas Lapham and Bromfield Corey (Tom's father) provide an intriguing contrast. Bromfield Corey is a talented artist, trained in Europe. However, he does not practice painting. In fact, he does not do much of anything but philosophize about money, society, and life. His well-respected family lives off inherited money. In contrast, Silas Lapham works for his living and has built a successful business selling, ironically, paint. The Coreys have a prominent position among Boston's elite, but their finances are strained. The Laphams are simple people at heart and socially backward, yet have financial abundance. Bromfield Corey has a confidence and self-possession that Silas Lapham lacks. Silas, on the other hand, makes full use of his time and talents.

The well-rounded, realistic portrayal of the Lapham's marriage relationship is unusual in nineteenth-century literature. It is one of the strengths of the story. Silas and his wife clearly share a strong love and devotion, yet they have real conflict. One sharp disagreement that impacts the events in the book is over Silas' duty to help Milton Rogers. Silas' clandestine charity toward Zerilla and her mother puts distance between husband and wife. Straining to appear what they were not certainly taxed their relationship. They were obviously happier and more at home with each other while living a simpler life.

What did you learn, getting to know the Lapham family and their history? Are there any take-away principles that apply as much now as they did then? Perhaps you have never read a book on the topic of nineteenth-century business, society, prestige (and the lack thereof). The Laphams and their acquaintances wear different clothes, have different interior decorating styles, and travel in horse-drawn vehicles, but do they not succeed, blunder, gain, and lose exactly the same way we do today? The same things that were important then are important now. May we seek to rise in integrity rather than status.

Questions on *The Rise of Silas Lapham*

1. What do you think is the theme of *The Rise of Silas Lapham*? (Theme refers to the universal idea that the story conveys.) Write a paragraph explaining your reasons, referring to specific elements of the novel.
2. A feeling of pity by one character for another is a thread running through the novel. Identify three instances of this, and explain what happens as a result.
3. Write a letter of advice to one of the characters in the story as they face a crucial decision or situation. Write at least two or three paragraphs.

Literary Analysis

The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy by Pietra Rivoli

Reality is more complicated than theory.

In 1999 Georgetown University Business School professor Pietra Rivoli passed by a student demonstration condemning large corporations and the way countries conducted global trade. She heard a young speaker ask, "Who made your T-shirt?" The speaker then asked if it came from a young, abused worker in Vietnam or a sweatshop in India. Rivoli decided to investigate the production, distribution, and consumption of T-shirts. Her findings show the complexity of the issues involved. She reveals that reality and solutions to problems are much more complicated than we would like to think.

Rivoli also shows the benefits of trade and the virtue of markets. The student protestor asked a sincere and well-intentioned question, but did not have the full picture of all that goes into the making of a T-shirt in our messy, unjust, striving, creative, energetic world. Pietra Rivoli presents that full picture. The reader will never look at the tag on a T-shirt in the same way.

Rivoli conducted research on the level expected for academic publications. Because she is an academic and wrote the book in an academic setting, it has more detail, more footnotes, and more background to support conclusions than most non-fiction works. The exhaustive detail can get tiresome at some points. One weak spot in her style is overusing particular phrases, such as the "virtuous circle" (referring to farmers, researchers, and government policy-makers working together) and the "race to the bottom" (referring to industry racing to lower production costs). Repeating the same phrase too many times can be annoying to the reader. However, her style for the most part is easy to read. She also has the ability to identify and focus on what really matters in a topic or question, especially what matters for the people involved.

The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy addresses aspects of everyday life for people all around the world, yet most of us know surprisingly little about these realities.

Were you surprised to learn that 95% of garments that Americans purchased in a recent year were produced in other countries?

Were you astonished to learn that technological changes cost more American jobs than companies moving production to other countries?

Were you shocked that some Chinese companies sew in labels that say "Made in Vietnam?"

Were you amazed to learn that several presidents and members of Congress have worked out deals to protect the dwindling U.S. textile industry, that subsidies make agriculture a far cry from a beacon of free trade, and that politicians' espousal of free trade actually hides numerous hushed-up treaties and deals?

Essential for the reader's understanding of current dynamics, Rivoli carefully traces the relevant history: the transition from wool to cotton as the textile fiber of choice; the development of cotton farming; textile production as it shifts from country to country; the growth of special deals by the U.S. government for textile industries; and the more-recent development of the second-hand clothing market in Africa.

Rivoli helps the reader better understand the local and world economy, including the impact of cotton harvesting machines on the farm labor market; the comparative advantage certain countries have in producing particular goods; globalization; the impact of immigration laws;

tariffs in international trade; the impact of farm chemicals on agricultural production but also on the environment; the movement of production; labor costs; the idea of creative destruction, which means that the creative development of new goods and services leads to new employment opportunities but also leads to the destruction of former industries and the disappearance of jobs in those industries.

The author concludes that we need both corporations and protesters. The corporations provide jobs and help people escape poverty and move toward a higher standard of living. On the other hand, protesters and those who question corporate practices help to protect human rights and the environment when corporations tend to focus on the bottom line of profits. Another important conclusion the author stresses is the importance of freedom, both political and economic. She says that "it is a state-engineered [economic] system that limits the ability of these workers to participate in the market as full citizens" (page 109). Individuals, no matter where they live, are better off with free--or at least freer--markets than with a government-run economy.

The Travels of a T-shirt in the Global Economy reminds us once again how much economics matters in everyday life. When you purchase a T-shirt (and later dispose of it), you are a player in a complicated economic system. Our choices in that system matter, but discerning the right and wrong of those choices is a complicated process.

Questions on *The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy*

1. From what perspective does the author write? What is her place in history, in geography, her background, her point of view and experience? How does her perspective influence the way she assesses and responds to her topic? Write one paragraph which includes your answers to all of these questions.
2. What do you feel are the key passages in the book? Think about the main conclusions and what supports them. What do these passages convey? What difference should these conclusions make in the thoughts and actions of the reader? Write three paragraphs.
3. What other industry needs a treatment like *The Travels of a T-shirt in the Global Economy*? Why do you think so? What would you like to know about the truth of the industry? How do you think society would benefit? Write two or three paragraphs.

Literary Analysis

Mover of Men and Mountains

by R.G. LeTourneau

"Christianity with its sleeves rolled up." This phrase describes the life, faith, and work of industrialist R. G. LeTourneau. The memoir of this inventor and innovator is a testimony to the power and love of God and how one person with Christian faith operating a "secular" business can accomplish great things.

LeTourneau writes with a humble, honest voice. He is awed and thankful for what God did in and through him. He is vulnerable about his own weakness. For example, he describes how he and his father had a poor relationship when he was growing up. When they both repented of their poor attitudes, their relationship got much better. This is a lesson many children and parents can take to heart. Several times in the story, he admits to shifting his reliance on God to relying on himself and striving to get back on track.

LeTourneau is a real-life example of the same archetype "rags-to-riches" employed in *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. Though LeTourneau did not quite begin life in rags, he certainly achieved wealth and influence he could not have imagined while working for his brother, pulling stumps and chopping firewood. His career had many setbacks, but LeTourneau refused to let them defeat him. Clearly, his Christian faith defined his life. He gave credit to God for every good thing that happened to him. His business enjoyed considerable growth even during the Great Depression. He and his wife decided to give 90% of their income to the Lord's work and keep 10%, instead of the usual other way around. LeTourneau understood that the point of life is not to accumulate wealth, but the work that he performed to honor God did bring him wealth. That is why he gave so much of it away.

In his informal story-telling style, LeTourneau discusses many theological themes. Sincere Christians have different viewpoints on the way God works in our lives, so it's okay to disagree with him on some points. One continuing thread in the book is LeTourneau's belief that God rewards faithfulness with prosperity and other blessings. He also felt that he was sometimes punished after straying. This is a complex topic.

Many examples in Scripture show that God certainly does bless His faithful people. However, the idea that if you are obedient God will reward you materially does not square with Scripture or with life. God also "causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). There are many wealthy people outside the family of God. Among the faithful, God calls different people to different circumstances. Any Christian businessperson who enjoys success should thank God, from whom all blessings flow.

Still, for many Christians throughout history and today, being faithful to God has led to poverty, jail or the execution block. God rewards those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6), but the rewards are not always wealth. LeTourneau indicates that he saw the loss of his infant son as a punishment from the Lord for his lack of obedience. There are some Biblical examples of such consequences (see 2 Samuel 12:13-14), but a loss is not always a punishment, though people are often quick to make that judgment.

In John 9:2, Jesus' disciples asked him about a man who was blind from birth, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" Jesus told them, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him." Jesus went on to heal the man. God is in control and has His purposes for what happens, but we cannot always presume to know what His purposes are. However God weaves the

tapestry of our lives, we are called to glorify and trust him.

In this life story of a successful businessman, we find many examples of how economics works:

Productivity: LeTourneau realized that larger machines can get more done. "Man is worth what man produces, and when machines increase his production he is worth more." He means this in an economic sense, of course, and not in terms of a person's worth before God.

Supply and demand: LeTourneau sensed a growing demand for large earth-moving equipment, so he supplied what was needed to do the work more efficiently. The availability of this equipment in turn increased the demand for it.

Role of construction: We see the importance of construction in the overall economy. Earth-moving work provides jobs in that industry and also in building roads and bridges. Large-scale construction in turn creates and expands other industries.

The "one percent": LeTourneau was among the group that many people negatively refer to as "the wealthy." The assumption that those who are wealthy must have done something wrong is unfair. Rather than hurting the poor, LeTourneau funded job training and gave generously to many charities. He created hundreds of jobs in his own and related industries.

Specialization: The book tells you more about earth-moving equipment and work in a foundry than you probably ever wanted to know--unless you have an interest in those fields or in engineering. That is the nature of specialization. People who specialize in a particular field become experts. They know extensive detail and think about the subject more deeply than other people. This benefits the rest of society: we depend on the skills and knowledge of others without fully realizing it. Even if we don't find big machines and mountain-moving as fascinating as LeTourneau did, we can respect and find inspiration in his passion for his work.

Government regulations: LeTourneau and those he worked with had many close calls in the foundry and on construction jobs. This leads to the topic of safety regulations, which have increased manifold since his day. These regulations have a personal and economic impact, as do accidents. There are many different opinions on what is appropriate. Are stringent safeguards necessary, or is the government trying to "protect us from ourselves"?

The impact of war: War has profound economic consequences. The aftermath is complex, increasing the wealth of some and destroying the livelihoods of many. The contribution of engineers and manufacturers like LeTourneau is a story we don't usually hear about in war history. They played an essential role in the Allies' victory in World War II.

The life of R.G. LeTourneau shows the impact that one person can have on far-flung corners of the planet. LeTourneau put his mind and energies to what could be done, not what couldn't be done. The attitude, "there are no big jobs, only small machines," inspired him to break new ground (no pun intended)! LeTourneau believed, "When the Lord has a job for you to do, He'll give you the strength and the ability to do it."

LeTourneau's story is a reminder that economics is really about individuals. It also reminds us that honest work done well honors God. This is how each of us should view his or her life and service, whatever that service might be. We also each have a place in God's economy, and have an obligation, like LeTourneau, to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." (Colossians 1:10)

Questions on *Mover of Men and Mountains*

1. In two or three paragraphs, write a synopsis and review of *Mover of Men and Mountains*.
2. What do you think was LeTourneau's purpose in writing his autobiography? Write one paragraph answering this question.
3. Write two or three paragraphs about a person you know who is a servant of the Lord in a "secular" job. How does this person honor God through his or her work? What special opportunities does his or her career provide for ministry?